

Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) Commission Hearing

Statement of Ricardo F. Randle, Director, Hartford VA Regional Office, August 25, 2003

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Commission, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the CARES Program as it relates to the Hartford VA Regional Office.

The Veterans Benefits Administration is fully supportive of the goals of the CARES Program.

VBA has had representation on the CARES National Policy Steering Committee and on the Regional Implementation Steering Committees. VBA has collaborated with VHA in identifying and prioritizing co-location opportunities such as moving the VA Regional Office from Hartford to the Newington Campus of the Connecticut Healthcare System. VBA's review focused on how these planning initiatives could support and enhance our strategic goal to improve the productivity, accuracy, and timeliness of benefits delivery. VBA believes that careful analysis and coordination are essential as these initiatives move forward to ensure that there is no adverse impact on our operations or service delivery.

As a result of the CARES planning process and the VBA and VHA joint co-location efforts, five goals were established to evaluate potential co-location opportunities and this planning initiative in particular. These are:

- Improve Service to Veterans
- Improve Operational Efficiency
- Reduce Net Costs
- Maximize use of VA Assets and
- Improve Employee Working Conditions

This project offers unique opportunities for VBA and VHA and will benefit VA as a whole.

The Hartford/Newington co-location will improve service to veterans by providing "one-stop shopping" for all of the veterans' benefits and medical needs, and will provide free parking and fully accessible facilities.

Operational efficiency will be improved by providing a state-of-the art facility with the latest in information technology, increased collaboration communication between claims examiners and physicians, and redesigned division work areas to increase and enhance workflow, accuracy and timeliness.

Net costs will be reduced by eliminating the payment of annual GSA rent. In addition, VBA and VHA will investigate opportunities to integrate various operational functions, which will potentially reduce costs still further.

This project will maximize the use of VA assets by using existing vacant space at the Newington Campus.

Employee working conditions will be improved by providing a new, well designed working environment with the latest information technology. Access to existing training and support facilities will further enhance employees' productivity. The new facility will incorporate improvements to the overall work environment for visitors and employees with improved lighting, noise abatement, temperature control, health and safety features, and accessible accommodations for handicapped veterans.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared statement. I will be pleased to respond to any questions you or the members of the Commission may have.